

Fostering or Adopting an Intact Male Dog

The ASPCA normally requires that all cats and dogs receive routine spay or neuter surgery prior to adoption. However, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, veterinarians in some communities have stopped offering elective surgical services, including spay/neuter. Therefore, it has become necessary to adopt animals out before they have been spayed or neutered and allow owners to take them in for spay/neuter when regular vet services resume in their communities.

Living with an intact (not spayed or neutered) dog can present some challenges, but they are relatively easily managed. It may take several months for normal spay/neuter services to resume in our community, so adopters need to be prepared for the possibility of living with an intact animal for some time.

Dog overpopulation is still an animal welfare concern, so please take the earliest opportunity to have your new dog neutered when elective vet services are available again.

Age and Time of Sexual Maturity

On average dogs reach sexual maturity between 5-12 months of age, which is when you may start to notice hormonally driven behavior problems. This is also when you need to take steps to prevent unwanted pregnancies. However, continued socialization with other dogs is critical for proper development of social behavior so it's important that you continue to socialize your male dog, preferably with spayed females and neutered males, to minimize potential problems.

Special Considerations for Living with an Intact Male Dog

Urine Marking

When male dogs urine mark, they typically approach a vertical surface of some sort, sniff, turn around, raise a hind leg and urinate a small amount of urine as high up on the vertical surface as they can manage. They are especially prone to "overmarking" in that they mark over other dogs' urine. Dogs glean a lot of information about other dogs, including sex, reproductive status and even individual identity, from sniffing their urine marks. Likewise, when they leave their own mark, they are conveying that information about themselves to others.

Most mature male dogs urine mark outdoors, on trees, bushes, vehicles, fire hydrants, parking meters, basically anything that stands out to them. Some dogs are prone to marking indoors as well; most often on furniture or drapes. A well housetrained dog may still be triggered to urine mark indoors, particularly if they detect another dog's urine in an area. That's why it's very important to thoroughly clean indoor urine-marked areas with an enzymatic cleaner (multiple brands, available for purchase online or in pet supply stores) per package instructions.

If your dog looks like he might mark indoors, do your best to redirect him as soon as you see him sniffing. If he begins to lift his leg, immediately interrupt the behavior by making a sound to distract him (e.g. clapping your hands) or tossing something that startles him (e.g. car keys), before he begins to mark. Immediately take the dog to his appropriate elimination area and reward him for urinating there. Provide frequent opportunities for him to mark outdoors. If you are attempting to train the dog to use an indoor area, make sure you have incorporated a vertical surface, such as a fake plastic fire hydrant, so that he can raise his leg on it. You can encourage him to urinate on it by dabbing a bit of his own urine, or even better, another male dog's urine, on the object.

If interrupting the dog and encouraging him to mark in appropriate areas isn't working, you should consider using a belly band so that if he does mark, he simply urinates into an absorbent pad rather than in your home.

If your dog is producing more urine than usual, if urine has a pink or red color, or if he seems to be stressed or in pain when urinating, there could be something medical going on. Contact your veterinarian.

Humping

One embarrassing, but natural, behavior that some intact male dogs engage in is mounting and humping. They may hump other dogs, people, or even objects such as pillows and toys. While there are several reasons why a dog might hump, some intact males do this as a form of masturbation.

If your dog persistently humps another dog, it can be extremely annoying to the other dog and the other dog's owner. At the first sign that your dog is going to mount the other dog, interrupt him verbally and, if that doesn't deter him, immediately shoo him off. If he continues to harass the other dog, it's best to leash him up and leave the situation. If he's interested in humping a person, he'll typically show courtship behavior first, including "flirty ears," pawing, licking and nose poking. If you see those behaviors, immediately put him on leash, put him in a down stay and prevent him from engaging in the behavior.

Aggression toward Other Intact Males

As intact male dogs mature, they are more likely to exhibit aggression toward other intact male dogs. While this is certainly manageable, particularly with training, it's important to be aware of the potential for aggression and to remain more vigilant if your intact male is interacting with other intact males.

Roaming/Interest in Estrus Females

Intact male dogs are hormonally motivated to roam, especially if there is a female dog in heat anywhere within sniffing distance (which is much farther than you might think). Make sure your yard is secure and always have your dog on leash during walks. Off-leash training and hiking in unenclosed areas should be avoided if your male dog is not reliably trained.

No Contact Between Intact Males and Females

It can be challenging to keep intact males and females in the same home without a high risk of pregnancy. When female dogs come into heat, intact males can be very forceful in their attempts to

mate, breaking through barriers or even breeding the female through a wire kennel, fence or crate door. And a successful breeding can happen very quickly so it's best to make sure there's complete separation of the male and female until the female's heat has concluded.

Intact Dogs in Public Places

As a guardian of an intact male, it is your responsibility that he not be an annoyance when out in public. Property owners don't want dogs urine marking on their buildings or landscaping. Intact males are rarely welcome in dog parks because they are prone to mounting and humping other dogs, thereby making fights more likely. If you have to board your dog, make sure that you notify the boarding kennel that he is intact so that he can be kept away from estrus females. Regardless of the sex and reproductive status of your dog, we recommend not utilizing the services of dog daycares or training classes during COVID-19 social distancing.

For more information, please visit <https://www.aspcapro.org/covid19sn>